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The CIA Has Its Virtues—as Kennedy Learned During the Cuban Missile Crisis

BY HARRY ROSITZKE

The Central Intelligence Agency's connection to the Ellsberg and Watergate affairs has again raised the question of the agency's proper functions in the foreign affairs of the United States. What does CIA contribute? Do we need intelligence, secret or otherwise? Why spy?

The word "intelligence" in the agency's title covers two widely separate activities: academic-type research and analysis in Washington, and secret operations abroad.

The CIA's main overseas mission is to carry on espionage and counter-espionage work, a mission that rarely warrants notice on the front pages. Its principal function in government, however, is to provide the President with estimates of foreign events and situations that are as objective and as close to reality as is humanly possible.

Such estimates are based upon a solid foundation of evidence and interpretation, the CIA's main day-to-day business. What is happening to the Chilean economy? What popular support do the Greek colonels enjoy? What prompted Peking to wave a friendly Ping-Pong paddle at Washington? What military and economic pressures led Leonid I. Brezhnev into his opening to the West?

Espionage reports per se normally contribute only a small share to the pool of information with which the CIA's intelligence analysts work, but occasionally a single agent-report makes a crucial difference.

A Communist source delivered a verbatim copy of Nikita S. Khrushchev's 1956 "secret speech" that alerted the world to the force and venom with which the new Soviet regime rejected Josef Stalin and his policies. In another case, a few reports from a Soviet colonel in Moscow saved the Pentagon at least a quarter-billion dollars in research and development. Two agents in different parts of the world—both Communist Party members—sent in the first reports of border differences between Moscow and Peking—as early as the winter of 1957-58.

The Cuban missile crisis was a dramatic example of the confluence of basic research, analysis, prediction and agent-reports that gave President Kennedy the information needed to make his decisions.

Without a specialist on Soviet crates who could judge what was inside the boxes on the decks of Soviet freighters going to Cuba, without experts on Soviet launching sites, without the previous U-2 flights over the U.S.S.R., without detailed military-technical data from a top-level agent in Moscow, without a few sound (among the many unsound) leads provided by agents inside Cuba—without all these, the Soviet missiles could easily have become operational before the President was able to take preventive action.

It is essential, of course, that the intelligence analyst be as free as possible from preconceptions that will prejudice his conclusions. His task, like that of the academic historian or the journalist, is to let the facts, and the facts alone, form the basis for his final judgments.

A major threat to the exercise of unprejudiced analysis in the government is the distorting influence of so-called departmental intelligence—estimates made in the Departments of State and Defense on matters of crucial policy interest to them.

The main virtue of *central* intelligence is to produce independent national estimates and not leave the estimating function in the hands of the policy-makers.

Any department of the government with policy-making powers is bound on occasion to use the information available to it in support of its own policies. The Department of State, for example, may be inclined to select or highlight facts and interpretations that support the department's or the President's adopted courses of action—say, in the Arab-Israeli conflict or in the India-Pakistan confrontation on Kashmir and Bangladesh.

The Defense Department similarly will tend to overestimate an enemy's capabilities and be constantly alarmed about his intentions. Generals naturally want more and better arms to meet these "threats," and it is around budget time that the military tells Congress and the public about its principal worries: the alarming number of Soviet missiles and launching sites, the impressive size and quality of the enemy submarine fleet, an impending Chinese missile threat.

On these and other crucial information questions, the CIA's independent intelligence function has served over the years to give the President as disinterested and level-headed "estimates of the situation" as only a separate intelligence agency can.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in the great game of counting Soviet missiles the CIA's numbers have consistently been more modest than the Pentagon's.

Some attack all intelligence work, departmental or central—as one writer did on this page some weeks ago. Such critics appear to be convinced that the intelligence function serves no useful purpose, since the analyst always comes out with the conclusion he subjectively wants.

In my own experience, this is simply not true. The analysts I have known are not only extremely well informed but reasonably self-critical, and, when they differ with each other, the arguments that ensue are likely to shake out any hidden assumptions or political biases one or another may entertain. Intelligence work is a profession, not a bureaucratic game, and personal detachment is a basic element in the profession's ethic.

Yet, intelligence analysts, like his-

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Harry Rositzke worked for the Office of Strategic Services and the Central Intelligence Agency for 26 years before he retired in 1970. He is author of the book, "U.S.S.R. Today."